

## **The Impact of Empathy Implanted Cause Related Marketing Communication on Customer Attitude towards Brand Image: A Hint for Mirror Neuron Based Cause Related Marketing Communication in Kerala**

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**Abstract:** Customer retention is becoming a major area of threat for firms after the digital revolution. Customers are more informative than the sellers most of the time. Word of mouth is spreading round the corner too fast than ever. If a brand makes any mistake by its own way, the imminent damage to the firm and the product is certain. Marketing is redefined everyday with new modes of communication and persuasion experiments. Cause Related Marketing compared to other forms of marketing communications is emerging as a more acceptable form of brand communication and social awareness. Further, the understanding of the cause importance, type of cause used in the program, product fit and personal experience of the cause are becoming major influential factors that may influence consumer response to the marketing communication. The current study attempts to find out that do a special category of causes, which are high in triggering empathy, imitation, personal relevance and highly contextual, change the attitude of customer towards a brand more positively than an ordinary cause. The characteristics of Mirror Neuron Based communication is standing very similar to the qualities of empathy, imitation, contextual and personal relevance. The understanding of principles behind the highly appealing causes can direct us to know more about Mirror neurons and their implications in marketing communication

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Date of Submission: 27-11-2018

Date of acceptance: 08-12-2018

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### **I. Introduction**

A cause is defined as organized efforts or activities designed to alleviate a societal problem (O'Brien, 2004). Other terminologies for cause-related marketing include pragmatic altruism, strategic giving and commercial co-venture (Smith and Higgins, 2000). Varadarajan and Menon(1988) defined cause-related marketing as a process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives.

Friedman (1962) believed that business had no social responsibility, excluding generating profit for its owners. He concluded (Friedman, 1962) by saying, "there is one and only one social responsibility of business-to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game" (p. 133). According to Smith and Higgins, (2000) aftermath of his sentiment led to the widespread growth distrust practices of marketing and consumerism. They defended consumerism as pre-marketing, also explained the reason for marketing's poor reputation was due to some firms which betrayed customer's trust for profits. Kotler (1987) made an attempt to defend marketing at the time of unhealthy controversies by establishing the domain of *humanistic marketing*. The quote of Smith and Higgins (2000). Humanistic marketing is a marketing philosophy that takes as its central objective the earning of profits through the enhancement of the customer's long run wellbeing. It assumes that the consumer is active and diligent, seeks satisfaction of both immediate needs and larger interests and favors companies that develop products, services, and communications that enrich the customer's life possibilities (p. 272).

## **II. Literature Review**

According to Fisher (1980), the principles of “enlightened self-interest” and “doing well by doing good” demonstrated explicit features of corporate philanthropy. Becker-Oslen et al. (2006) suggested that relative to a high fit alliance, a low company-cause fit results in a greater number of thoughts that are more focused on firm motives. On the other hand, if the company-cause fit is high, consumers are less likely to elaborate and focus on firm motives. So this study proposes that

### **H1: Cause identity is positively related to the brand attitude of customers**

The fit is the observed link between a cause domain and a company's products, image, positioning and/ or target groups (Varadarajan and Menon, 1998). This is very allied with associative network theory (Becker-Oslen et al. 2006). Whenever there is good congruence between knowledge, associations, expectations, actions, and competences of a company and the cause domain observed by the customer, it is with no trouble adopted in the prevailing thinking. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) found that fit led to a substantial positive outcome on a purchase decision.

### **H2: Product identity is positively related to the brand attitude of customers**

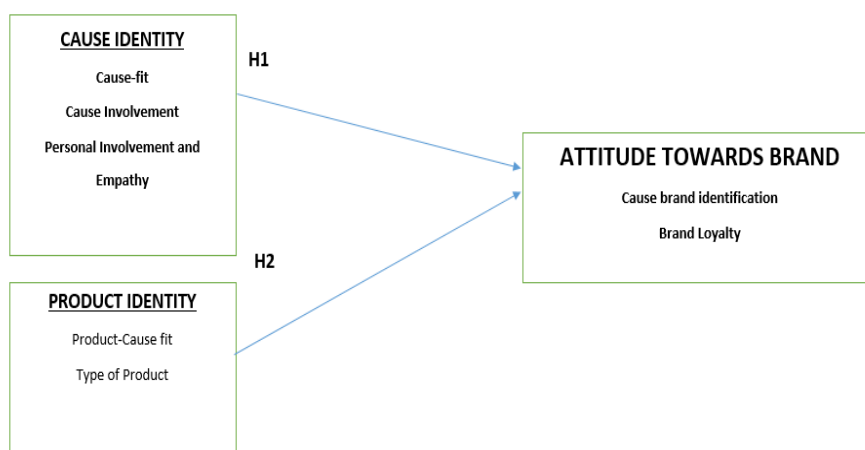
Past research found that customers associate the cause with own individual relevance and subsequently judge the CRM campaign. For example, in disaster causes, customers are more personally engaged and have higher intentions to participate (Ellen, 2000). Ferle, Kuber, and Edwards (2013) indicate that Indian students displayed better evaluation than US students, of the CRM message when a national firm rather than an MNC launches it. Another frequently discussed moderating variable in CRM literature is the effect of cause involvement. The notion of involvement infers a personal association or bridging experience for a person (Landerth-Garu and Garreston-Folse, 2007).

### **H3: Local, humanitarian, and sudden cause (Kerala flood relief) has better cause identity than an international, ongoing cause (Saving Amazon rainforest)**

Piliavin and Charng (1990), Vlad and Leenders (2011) and Skitka (1999) held the view that disasters are normally accompanied by a lot of human suffering and hardships, hence easy to attract the sympathy and support from other people. Favorable confirmation came from studies of Benadpudi, Singh and Bendapudi, (1996) and Ellen et al. (2000).

Sherif et al. (1965) suggested that personal relevance is connected an individual as the primary component of ego involvement, very much crucial to their self-identity. Personal involvement is based on the values, needs, and interests of the individual (Zaichkowsky, 1985). The study of Gupta and Pirsch (2006) indicated that the safest bet when considering a cause-related marketing campaign is to find a cause that has a high degree of fit with their company and also important to have a cause that is highly relatable to the target audience. The ongoing engagement in socially responsible activities by corporations can strengthen their ties with societies and build trust with consumers. Those activities can alleviate anti-business sentiments and enhance corporate images (Forehand and Grier, 2003). Piliavin and Charng (1990), Vlad and Leenders (2011) and Skitka (1999) held the view that disasters are normally accompanied by lot of human suffering and hardships, hence easy to attract the sympathy and support from other people.

According to Fogassi et al. (1998) and Gallese et al. (1996), there are neurons, which are endowed with mirror properties as that of premotor cortex, discharging mirror properties both during the observation and execution of the same motor act. Fogassi et al. (1998) and Gallese et al. (1996) conclude that the motor and visual organization of IPL is very important on account of two reasons. One, it indicates that motor actions are organized in the parietal cortex in specific chains of motor acts. Two, it heavily proposes that this chained organization may constitute the neural basis for understanding the intentions of others. Since, the IPL neurons have the chained motor organization capacity, they possess great importance. The functional role of mirror neurons is that of action understanding, Yokochi et al. (2003). Weber (2007) viewed that mirror neurons enable the consumer to learn vicariously in a passive environment, which is an ideal scenario as it represents most situations in which the customer is exposed to a marketing message.



**Figure 1: Research Model**

Source: Designed by the researcher

### III. Methodology

The Independent variables (Predictor variables) are: Cause identity factors (cause fit, cause involvement, personal involvement, and empathy) and product identity factors which, is formed by product-case fit and type of product. Dependent variable (Response variable) is Brand attitude, which is formed by Cause brand identification and Brand Loyalty. The set target was to identify the causal relationship between the type of cause and attitude to the cause, and change in attitude to the brand due to the intervention of CRM message exposure

A survey method was chosen to conduct the study. Using a structured questionnaire set up, comparison groups received different exposures and groups are then compared with respect to their dependent variables. In this study, the comparison is made between the responses to a local Cause Related Marketing campaign and an ongoing international Cause Related Marketing campaign with that of a control group response, wherein no Cause Related Marketing message is used. The questionnaire consisted on Likert scale rating (1-strongly agree to 5- strongly agree). The target product taken in this research was Noodles. Fast-food has frequently used by customers and they are directly linked with health issues such as adulteration, poisonous chemicals etc. To prevent any bias from memory, fictitious product names and project names were taken (Figy noodles and Amazon Rainforest saving project, Kerala flood relief project etc.).

**Table 1: Cause Identity Factors**

Cause	Donation Amount	Cause Attribute 1	Cause Attribute 2	Cause Attribute 3
Amazon Reforesting	Rs. 2/-	International	Ongoing disaster	No personal experience
Kerala Flood Relief	Rs. 2/-	Local	Sudden Disaster	Direct personal experience

Source: Prepared by the researcher

To minimize the level of personal involvement toward a cause, for the first treatment group the Saving of Amazon region was selected, which is far away from Kerala, and No respondent has ever seen or experience. To maximize personal involvement, empathy and imitation a recent flood relief cause have been taken for the second treatment group, which is recent, all participants were badly affected and local. All the groups were exposed to a negative description about the brand, which told about how this noodles brand was caught up by authorities when tested it was found with poisonous chemical content such as lead and MSG in excess amount followed by the description about various Cause Related Marketing messages. The control group was not exposed to any Cause Related Marketing message. Cause identity consists of sub-dimensions such as of cause involvement, cause fit, personal involvement and empathy.

### IV. Data Collection

320 respondents were divided into 3 groups, such as the control group, the Kerala flood group, and the Amazon group. All three groups were exposed to different messages and the impacts were measured using a structured questionnaire. The analysis revealed that the local-sudden disaster cause has brought about more positive customer attitude towards the firm. The underlying principle behind this liking may be the role of mirror neurons. Students from a Post Graduate Management college in an urban province of Kerala participated in the survey. Each survey consisted of a description of the company with its bad image and for the treatment groups with a full description along with photos of the Cause Related Marketing campaigns. Personal involvement and

empathy were measured using 6 item from the works of Houston and walker (1996).Cause Involvement was measured using 4 item scale from Garu and Folse (2007), the Product-cause fit was measured using 5 item scale from Lafferty and Goldsmith (2005). Type of product was measured using 2 item from Wakefield and Inman,(2003), Cause-organizational identification measured using 3 item from Mael F. &Ashforth, (1992).Brand Loyalty was measured using 6 item scalefrom Lam et al.(2014)

### V. Analysis and Discussion

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS. Exploratory factor analysis, Cronbach’s alpha reliability, one-way analysis of variance, descriptive analysis and multivariate analysis of variance were produced to confirm the model of the research. The measurement model is validated by computing Inter-factor Correlation, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) estimates, and Measurement Model Fit Indices. Mean and standard deviation of variables are calculated by finding the average of all item scores for each variable per respondent. The interrelation between each construct was verified by computing inter-factor correlations in order to check whether constructs are interrelated as hypothesized. The correlation of latent constructs is established and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SPSS is computed for testing measurement model with help of covariance model.

**Table 2: Reliability and Validity**

Factors	Items	CFA item loadings	Cronbach's alpha
Cause Identity	D1	0.671	0.91
	D2	0.727	
	D3	0.731	
	D4	0.661	
	D5	0.746	
	D6	0.707	
	H1	0.706	
	H2	0.749	
	H3	0.794	
	H4	0.691	
	A1	0.769	
	A2	0.654	
	A3	0.635	
	A4	0.688	
	A5	0.684	
	A6	0.701	
Product Identity	T8	0.839	0.72
	T8B	0.898	
	T8C	0.795	
	T8D	0.753	
	T8E	0.879	
	T14	0.896	
	T15	0.885	
Attitude towards brand	W23	0.733	0.6738
	W24	0.915	
	W25	0.762	
	W36	0.774	
	W37	0.805	
	W38	0.901	

	W39	0.861	
	W40	0.856	
	W41	0.759	

To examine the validity and reliability of the constructs, we calculated the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and construct reliability for each of the factors. AVE reflects "the amount of variance that is captured by the construct in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error". The suggested minimum accepted value for AVE is 0.50. This indicates that the construct has a reliable measurement structure.

**Table 3:** Hypothesis 1:- Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R2
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.799	.322		5.589	.000
	cause_identity	.364	.100	.220	3.640	.000
						0.22

The regression analysis shows there is a significant influence of cause identity on attitude towards brand as the significance level are less than 0.05. The beta value shows one unit change in cause identity will bring 0.364 unit change in attitude towards the brand. R2 value shows the coefficient of determination is 22% which means there are certainly other variables to be considered.

**Table 4:** Hypotheses 2: -Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R2
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.128	.272		7.816	.000
	product_identity	.271	.088	.188	3.094	.002

**Table 5:** Hypothesis 3 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R2
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.799	.322		5.589	.000
	F flood_cause_identity	.364	.100	.210	3.640	.000
						0.21

The regression analysis shows there is a significant influence of local cause identity on attitude towards brand as the significance level are less than 0.05. The beta value shows one unit change in cause identity will bring 0.271 unit change in attitude towards the brand. R2 value shows the coefficient of determination is 18.6% which means there are certainly other variables to be considered.

**Table 6:** ANOVA Results

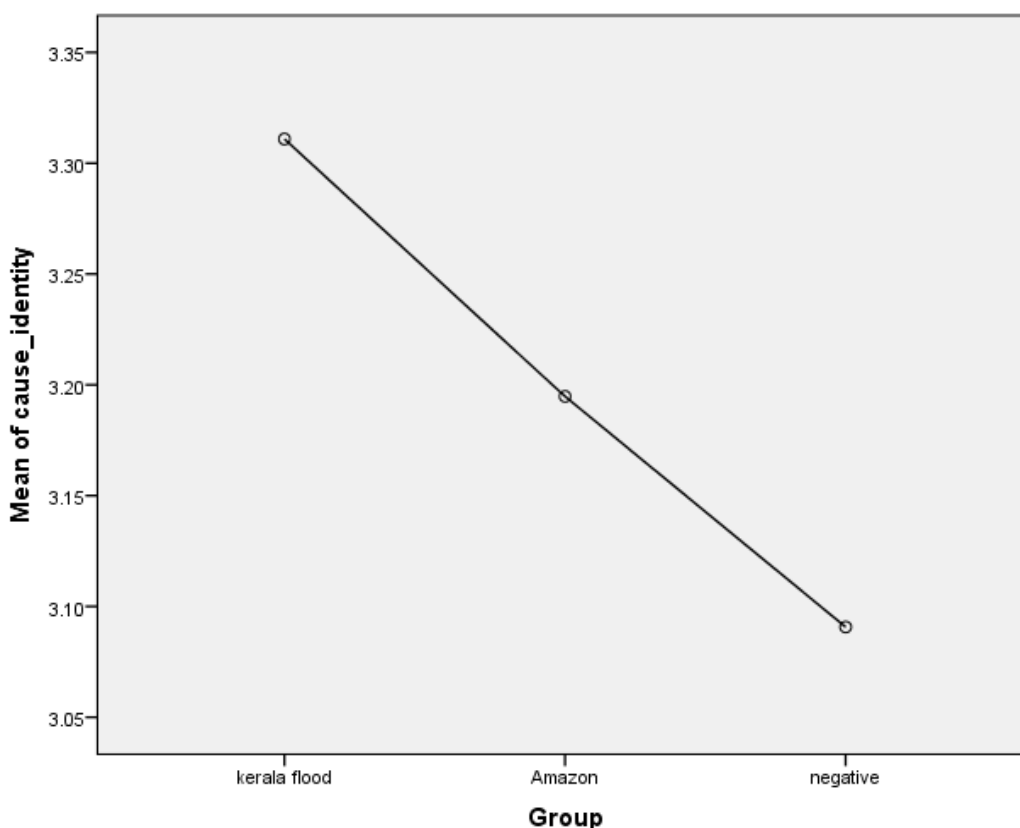
cause\_identity

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.204	2	1.102	7.493	.001
Within Groups	38.680	263	.147		
Total	40.884	265			

The ANOVA results show a significant difference between the perceptions of cause identity among the groups because the significance level is less than 0.05. So we have to conduct the post hoc analysis and the results are shown below.

**Table 7: Post Hoc Analysis**

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: cause_identity						
LSD						
(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
kerala flood	Amazon	.11615*	.05850	.048	.0010	.2313
	negative	.22020*	.05688	.000	.1082	.3322
Amazon	kerala flood	-.11615*	.05850	.048	-.2313	-.0010
	negative	.10405	.05758	.072	-.0093	.2174
negative	kerala flood	-.22020*	.05688	.000	-.3322	-.1082
	Amazon	-.10405	.05758	.072	-.2174	.0093



**Figure 2: Graphical Representation of Post Hoc Results**

The ANOVA results show that Kerala flood has highest cause identity of respondent followed by Amazon and least by negative.

**Table 8: Coefficients**

ANOVA					
product_identity					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.084	2	.042	.202	.817
Within Groups	54.482	263	.207		
Total	54.566	265			

The result has upheld the past research finding that customers associate the cause with own individual relevance and subsequently judge the CRM campaign. For example, in disaster causes, customers are more personally engaged and have higher intentions to participate (Ellen, 2000). In the case of acute, local and high involvement exposure, there is a chance of evoking more Emotional response, which is defined as a multidimensional response that can be triggered by a psychologically important incident or stimulus, regardless of whether it is real or imagined, past or present (Strummer et al., 2005), since the person has already

experienced similar experience. The product identity has shown no significant difference between the groups as the significance value is above 0.05. So no post hoc will be conducted on the study. The study has proved that product-cause fit has no role in imparting positive brand attitude in this situation, where cause identity is highly influencing the respondent. The same way the type of product tied up with the CRM campaign does not have a major role in influencing the respondent's attitude towards the brand.

## VI. Conclusion

- 1) The study proved that cause identity backed up by local, acute, disaster associated-lived-experience messages influence more favourably than ongoing, international and abstract cause related messages.
- 2) Local, acute, direct and high involvement causes form more identity and they are more effective in creating a positive brand attitude for a brand which is under negative image, compared to a cause which is international, ongoing disaster, low involvement, and indirect in nature.
- 3) The selection of appropriate cause is very important for the success of Cause Related Marketing campaigns, than product- cause congruence and type of product.
- 4) We can conclude that, since mirror neurons activate empathy and imitation in humans, the cause-related messages which carry the appeals of empathy and imitation could be considered as Mirror Neuron Based Cause Related Marketing communication.

## VII. Suggestions

- 1) Cause Related Marketing has the magnetic ability to create more favourable change in attitude to the brand that practices Cause Related Marketing, in regaining the lost image.
- 2) The major outcome of this study is that consumers have a more favourable attitude to a cause, which triggers empathy and imitation.
- 3) Finally, the change in attitude towards the brand is dependent upon the type of cause used in the campaign.
- 4) It is better to consider local, high involvement, and recent cause, which has more cause identity, means the cause which is more identical with the respondent's background, than a foreign, ongoing or indirect cause, which is lesser identical with the customer's background, for better outcome in CRM campaigns.

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## Appendix

### Cause Related Marketing campaigns

#### 1. Buy Figy Noodles, Save Amazon Rainforest, Save Nature.

Figynoodels India re- launched safe and tasty Figy instant noodles across India, along with a new Project called, “Save Amazon Rainforest project”. This is a Rs. 50 Crore Project aiming to restore the amazon region with 50 lakhs plants. Figy Noodles India will donate Rs. 2/- to this project while selling each packet of 500 gm instant noodles.



2. Buy Figy noodles, stand with KeralaNowFigy India is planning to help the flood affected people of Kerala to rebuild lives. Figy India will donate Rs.2/-, to the “Stand with Kerala: Help Flood victims of Kerala” project when a 200 gm. packet of Figy noodles is sold, to rebuild Kerala. Kindly at the message carefully and answer the questions in the survey.





Francis Sebastian. "The Impact of Empathy Implanted Cause Related Marketing Communication on Customer Attitude towards Brand Image: A Hint for Mirror Neuron Based Cause Related Marketing Communication in Kerala." IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) , vol. 20, no. 12, 2018, pp. pp. 01-09.